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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000236

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SUBJECT: CAMEROON: FOREIGN MINISTER CALLS IN AMBASSADOR

REF: YAOUNDE 146

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Linnisa Wahid for reasons 1.4.b and d

¶1. (C) Summary. Cameroon's Foreign Minister on March 5 told Ambassador that comments about domestic politics, such as the ruling party's plan to amend the constitution and eliminate presidential term limits, violate "diplomatic law." He nonetheless reaffirmed our mutual ties, leaving us wondering if his statements represented government policy or personal views. Other Western embassies have received similar lectures. Ambassador expressed gratitude for the Cameroon government's assistance to American citizens during the recent civil unrest, and then presented the Minister a diplomatic note protesting the March 1 unannounced forcible removal of peaceful demonstrators from Embassy premises. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador Garvey on March 5 met with Foreign Minister Henri Eyebi Ayissi at his request. Ayissi described the recent civil unrest as having three phases: an economic protest, which led to violence, destruction and loss of life; President Biya's February 27 speech to the nation; and finally, the "current situation."

Commenting on Domestic Politics "Violates...Diplomatic Law"

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¶3. (C) Ayissi said the government (GRC) was "surprised" that the Ambassador used non-official channels to address Cameroonian issues, specifically referring to her February 5 public statement about President Biya's proposed constitutional amendment (reftel). Ayissi continued that "concerning the statement about domestic politics...a public declaration from an Ambassador violates the cardinal principle of relations between two friendly states, and diplomatic law." The Ministry is here to "remind the Ambassador of the principles," he added. Ayissi stated that the Ambassador, during her first six months in Cameroon, had been mindful of that fact; however, she must "be careful" of the impressions that public statements may imply. Ayissi elaborated that the Ambassador's remarks could be viewed as offering "indirect support" for the recent events. He expressed his disapproval of her public approach, and emphasized that she would have his total support through official/institutional means to express her views. He hoped that the USG would continue to support and assist Cameroon. Ayissi closed by stating that the GRC would like to consolidate the strong will of the two governments for common and mutual interests.

## Clarifying US policy

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¶4. (C) Ambassador Garvey responded by first thanking the GRC for its assistance in providing security escorts for departing AmCits during the recent events. She expressed serious concern about the unannounced, forcible removal of peaceful demonstrators from Embassy premises by armed gendarmes, and provided the Minister with a formal diplomatic note to that effect. Furthermore, she expressed USG concerns about freedom of press issues and expressed her hope that the government will explore the underlying causes of the recent events, working with all sectors of society, and that all issues will be resolved peacefully and equitably.

¶5. (C) The Ambassador said that her statements about amending Cameroon's constitution were not a personal or Embassy position, but USG policy. She then clarified that before speaking on February 5, she had expressed USG concerns to several high-level officials, including President Biya. (Note: Ayissi seemed surprised at that revelation.) She had sought to do so with the Foreign Minister, but he was out of the country in the days prior to her speech. She reiterated that the USG has no intention to interfere in Cameroonian domestic politics; however, we wanted to help make sure that Cameroon "stayed on the right path and moved in the right direction."

## Other Embassies Getting Similar Messages

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¶6. (C) Other Western embassies have also been asked to go see the Foreign Minister. The Acting British High Commissioner

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told Poloff that Ayissi stressed to her that the problems leading to the civil unrest were economic, not political. Furthermore, Ayissi added that warnings by Western embassies to their nationals "damage the image of Cameroon." The Dutch and German Ambassadors also were called in by the Foreign Minister (and the Spanish and Canadians have been asked to come in) with a similar message: do not interfere in domestic politics.

## Comment

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¶7. (C) The Foreign Minister could be anticipating a possible response from Western embassies if the President presents a bill to the National Assembly next week to remove presidential term limits in the Constitution, as many expect could happen. He may also be trying to demonstrate his loyalty to the President and his importance in his own ministry. Other senior officials have not reacted strongly, in public or private, to our statements about the constitution. It is not clear if Ayissi's demarche reflects a change of approach by the government, or a freelance effort. GARVEY